



Wounded attachments to disaster recovery: Gendered structural violence and everyday life, Indian experiences explored

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we suggest that theorising on gendered structural violence and inequalities in disaster recovery would benefit from the in-depth focus on intersections of social relations and processes as they manifest in everyday lives. Drawing from the theorising on neoliberal states, we propose a new theoretical approach of “wounded attachments to disaster recovery”. This theoretical position is informed by the lives of three women survivors from three diverse disasters in India. Five perspectives on gendered disaster recovery experience is then presented: firstly, how the recovery beneficiary categories are an extension of the neoliberal subject position; secondly, how recovery reinforces gendered responsibilities as “building oneself back better”, a respectable mother and provider; thirdly, how recovery causes pain, suffering, and resentment; fourthly, how complex inequalities and social relations are lived through and negotiated in the aftermath of disasters; and finally, how women narrate counter cultural everydayness to disaster recovery in their life histories. We suggest that an understanding of intersectionality, or interlocking systems of oppression, as a form of injury, allows to understand power and structures of disaster recovery. Reiterations of such injuries suggest that instead of reducing vulnerability, and injustice, recovery efforts reiterate these very structures of inequality. The failure to operationalize and capture the complexities of structural inequality and injustice in the context of disaster recovery could be overcome by drawing on the work of scholars who recognise the limits of the concept of intersectionality and engage in alternate conceptualizations, such as pain, suffering, trauma and wounded attachments.

1. Introduction: structural inequalities, intersectionality and alternatives for disaster recovery

Disasters, irrespective of their scale and magnitude, have diverse impacts that need to be contextualised into their social, cultural, economic and political environments. Accordingly, for several decades, disaster scholars (see early works such as Anderson and Woodrow [1]; 13 Forthergill [2]; Fordham [70] Enarson and Fordham; Morrow and Phillips; Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe [3–5]; and more recently, [6,7]; and [8]) and reflexive disaster practitioners have produced understanding and tools for mapping intersectional (See e.g. Ref. [9]) inequalities or interlocking “major systems of oppressions” [10]; 362). Inequalities persist not only in disasters, but also in the disaster response. For example, the ground breaking book by Enarson and Morrow published in 1998, *Gendered Terrain of Disasters* suggested that

“although gender is a primary organising principle of social life, it only becomes significant ‘in a complex matrix of race, ethnicity, culture, class, sexuality, and age and is changed through life experience and political struggle’” [11]; 3). More recently, the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) [12] has pointed out:

People who are most vulnerable and exposed to natural and man-made hazards are hit hardest when disaster strikes. Without proper attention the same structures and systems that make them vulnerable and exposed can leave them marginalised or excluded from emergency aid and recovery.

Earlier South Asian gender and disaster literature, such as the Duryog Nivaran network’s contributions, has emphasised that when identifying disaster vulnerabilities, one would need to understand their complexity that “differ across economic class, ethnicity, age, physical conditions,

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etc. with gender dimensions cutting across all these, as well as others” [13]; 24). Madhavi Ariyabandu [14]; 6) has called this the “vulnerable within vulnerable”, pointing towards intersectionality and interlocking systems of oppression [15]; [74], 362). Similarly, outside the South Asian context, the need to understand the impacts of disasters and recovery efforts as gendered processes, but always also embedded in other structures of inequalities, such as class, caste, age and disability, has emerged as an analytical focus for gendered analyses of disasters since the 1990s.

More recently, the co-chair of the IDSN, Manjula Pradeep, has suggested that “the time has come to re-look into this entire issue of vulnerability and at intersectionality” [16]; 141–142). Indeed, the metaphor of intersection is useful to recognise that there are multiple dimensions of difference and that identities are compound. While it is essential to recognise dimensions of difference on the basis of caste, race, class ethnicity, age, indigeneity, amongst others, the question remains: how to operationalize intersectionality in policy, programmes, laws, interventions, humanitarian responses and disaster recovery? Previous analyses of concepts and approaches, such as disaster vulnerability, and community-based disaster response have suggested that adoption of such analytical concepts runs the risk of losing their analytical complexity, and they become de-historicised, decontextualised, and descriptive [17,18]). Similarly, gender and disaster aid scholarship has critically examined how analytics of gender become technocratic tools, rather than attending to complex analysis of gendered structures [6,19, 20,72,73].

Furthermore, narratives surrounding crisis, emergency and disaster management become standardised and produce universal and institutional processes of recovery that focus on the responsibilities of the individual victim/survivor to respond to hazards, risks, disaster events, and their recovery and adaptation capacity. Even amongst those whose aim is to address the causes of vulnerability – including governments, aid workers and NGOs – critical contributions to understanding disaster dynamics and disaster response are ignored in order to capture meta narratives that enable creation of global disaster policy frameworks [21]; 6–7).

This well-documented tension between individualized measures of empowerment and need for structural changes, and redistribution of wealth, has been a visible thread in transnational feminist movements between the Global South and Global North within the UN. This includes the advocacy on integrating gender equality perspective, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures in global disaster frameworks ([22]. As a result, rich feminist elaboration on intersecting and multiple inequalities, is used merely to identify or list multiple categories into which the disaster affected individuals belong to, rather than using more holistic lived experience in analysing structural causes of disaster vulnerability and inequality. Posing the gender question to disaster risk reduction interventions has become necessary given the gendered nature of disaster mortality and casualty. For example, as climate-induced hydrometeorological situations such as flooding increases, the question of gender-just healthcare becomes an important point of contention. Flood water seeped in garbage and debris, sewage, and mulch are more likely to enter women’s bodies through birth canals and crevices, endangering their health [23]. In fact, the gendered nature of inequities manifests in grave ways in disaster contexts. Social and cultural factors influence economic factors and has an impact on a range of dimensions such as income, nutrition, health, literacy, political participation and so on. For instance, the Indian Ocean tsunami demonstrated that women were more likely to lose their lives during complex disasters because they were less likely to possess survival skills such as swimming.

In this article, we suggest that theorising on gendered vulnerability, structural violence and inequalities in disaster recovery would benefit from a more in-depth focus on inequalities and their manifestations in everyday lives in disaster situations. We further suggest that understanding intersectionality as a form of injury would allow us to understand power and the structures of disaster recovery. Thus, we claim that

instead of reducing vulnerability and injustice, recovery efforts reiterate these very structures. Finally, the failure to operationalize and capture the complexities of structural inequality and injustice in the context of disaster recovery could be overcome by drawing from the work of scholars who recognise the limits of the concept of intersectionality and engage in alternative conceptualizations, such as pain, suffering, trauma and ‘wounded attachments’ [24], on which we elaborate below.

At the centre of this article is our attempt to find an alternative to universalized unidimensional and minimally intersectional welfare subject categories (such as women, female-headed household, martyr widow etc). These categories, we suggest, fall short of capturing the complexities of the lived experiences of inequalities. They often further marginalize the most vulnerable by excluding them as ineligible or undeserving victims of disaster interventions [25]. Social life is too irreducibly complex “to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions” [26]; 1773), quoted in Ref. [27]; 56). Further, the competing claims for recognition and representation like in the case of politics of positional difference (based on class, caste, gender etc) and cultural difference (based on nationality, language, religion etc), often obscure the issue of social justice. The politics of cultural difference is primarily state centric and dismisses a key understanding of structural inequalities emerging from the civil society and private spheres, where every day social relations play out [28].

Along these lines, our analytical lenses on inequalities in disasters draw on the work of Emily Grabham [29] who has conceptualised experiences of intersecting social inequalities as expressions of trauma and wounded attachments, further drawing on Wendy Brown’s [24] notion of ‘wounded attachments’. Wounded attachments refer to processes of pain and injury caused by identity and legal rights claims [29]. Such pain emerges as a result of disciplinary power that materializes as contradictions: promises of equality, freedom and self-determination on one side, and the complex structural inequalities that prevent the marginalized from realizing such a promised dream [24]; 62, 66–7). This ‘pain’ and ‘suffering’ – always situated through experienced everyday life within a matrix of power relations - gets expressed as subjects’ experiences of enmeshed inequalities on the mundane, everyday level. Drawing further on the works of Ann Cvetkovich [30] and Sara Ahmed [31]; we suggest that expressions of such trauma are often confrontational, and political, and relate to counter cultural every days of disaster recovery (see also in Ref. [20]). Accordingly, we propose that affect and affective processes of social life – such as joy, dysphoria, relationships, expectations and so on – are illustrative of the experienced material reality of gendered structural violence.

The rest of the article is structured in the following way. First, we briefly introduce the research methodology and life historical data, followed by three perspectives of wounded attachments to disaster recovery, drawing on life historical interviews of women in three diverse disasters in India: recurrent Marathwada droughts since 1970s in Maharashtra; the Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008, and the Kachchh earthquake in 2001. The analytical sections unfold five perspectives of gendered disaster recovery experience. Firstly, by focusing on experiences of recovery beneficiary and social welfare categories, we suggest that they function as extensions of a neoliberal subject position. Based on our analysis, these women actively embody, negotiate, and resist such positions. Secondly, we suggest that disaster recovery reinforces gendered responsibilities to ‘build back better’, primarily as a respectable mother and provider of care and livelihoods. Thirdly, we suggest that neoliberal recovery causes pain and suffering, and resentment of the recovery initiatives. Fourthly, our data illustrate how complex inequalities and social relations are lived through and actively negotiated in the aftermath of disasters. Finally, agency in disaster recovery is embedded in the pain and suffering that enable mutual co-operation and networks of care and support, forming counter cultural expressions of every day disaster recovery.

2. Methodology and data

At the centre of our methodological framework is the focus on life histories of disasters, a research focus that has mainly been used by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians in parallel with other qualitative methods such as ethnography, use of various forms of written archives and artefacts (see Ref. [32] for a lengthier discussion). The relevance and accuracy of life historical approaches has been debated over the past few decades in the social sciences, as an alternative to such modes of ‘realism’ that have attempted to reach a coherent account of whole societies. Life historians suggest focusing on the fragments and multiple voices [33], of disasters, for example. Such a focus on the micro-level and its detail enables the construction of a more complex understanding of the histories, socio-cultural orders, and social dimensions, and understand the lived aftermaths as “active site of struggle and contestation over legitimate subjectivities” [34]. Our analysis focuses on micro-histories and life historical interviews of three women survivors in three different disaster contexts in India.

By focusing on three Indian women and their life experiences, we aim to illustrate that it is impossible to reduce women’s disaster experiences solely to their gender. Rather, they differ in their religion, caste, socio-economic status, family status, age, ability and situatedness in the rural-urban scale. As the focus of our analysis is on gendered structural violence in disaster recovery, beyond the temporal boundaries of a disaster event, we found the in-depth life historical interviews as the most appropriate method for our data collection. Further, to do justice to the complexities of capturing the lived experience of structural inequalities in diverse disaster contexts, within a small sample, the maximum variation purposeful sampling strategy was found to be the best fit. It allows us to capture high quality detailed descriptions of each life historical account, highlighting its uniqueness and also identifying shared patterns that cut across the narratives [35]. To describe each of the life histories we have used the narrative analysis to configure the descriptions of events or happening into a coherent story with a plot line. The patterns that cut across the lived experiences of the three women emerge from a phenomenological analysis that reduces the detailed narratives to significant statements or quotes and combines them to arrive at themes and patterns. Having emerged from heterogeneity, these patterns become significant.

In fact, by focusing on women from three different disasters (earthquake, terrorist attack, and recurrent droughts), we aim to understand the complex dynamics within which these women negotiate their everyday. Yet, despite visible and immediate differences, “stitching them together, points at discursive resonances between them” [36]; 300). Stitching or quilting three initially and assumably unrelated and unconnected women’s life experiences of disasters in India draws from the research methodology put forward by black feminist and indigenous feminist practice of storytelling (see e.g., Refs. [36,37]. It is a research methodology through which multiple, but interconnected individual life histories are analysed together (see also [38–40]. Bringing together women’s life histories, and their intersectional differences, brings into light the dynamics between gendered sameness and difference. Furthermore, as Patricia Collins [15]; McKinzie [8] suggests “women’s standpoint from the position of marginalization gives them a way to analyse power relations and society in creative ways because they experience being *in* the dominant culture but also being denigrated as *other*” [8]; 524). They experience othering not through just one structure of inequality, such as their gender, but rather through what intersecting inequalities mean together [15]. Thus, we suggest that a process of quilting of women’s stories together refocuses the ways of knowing disasters. As Heidi Misra [41]; 2) has proposed: “This has a powerful meaning for women across cultures and time, and their hidden stories counter the silent consuming whiteness of normative legitimated knowledge and theory”. The religious, ethnic, racial and other dimensions of womanhood act as burdens of oppression on the gendered identity.

The analysis below starts from the life histories of three individual woman, which are then thematically connected to questions of structure, materiality and immateriality of such experience, drawing on wider understanding of group and collective responses to disasters and hazard risks. Our analysis illuminates gendered structural violence of disaster recovery in which intersections of age, gender, class, caste, religion, and ability matter. We propose that experience of “a woman” should be considered to be as relevant to listen to in disaster recovery efforts as a complex narration of systems of oppression, instead of reducing that experience into unidimensional neoliberal subject position or beneficiary category. All the interviews were conducted in vernacular languages and dialects, and direct quotes used in this paper have been translated by the authors into English.

“My story is much more dramatic than a movie”

Kalila (pseudonyms are being used to protect the anonymity of all interviewees), originally from Uttar Pradesh (UP), lives in Bhuj, district of Kachhh in Gujarat. For the past 20 years, she has lived in a temporary shelter neighbourhood, built in the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake (see e.g., Ref. [42]. The neighbourhood has changed from waste land into a temporary shelter location, one of the formally labelled slum areas in the city, and into a neighbourhood that is included in the newest town development plan. It is a target neighbourhood for initiatives such as the cities without slums [43] and the only neighbourhood in the city in which members of nearly 20 diverse caste and religious communities reside side-by-side.

Mother of three children, and grandmother of two, Kalila was brought up in UP as the only daughter in her family, “like a princess” she recalls. Her life changed dramatically when her soldier father was murdered, her mother passed away, and she grew up in a house of relatives. Her life thereafter was dominated by experiences of gender-based violence: married young to a violent husband and living through sexual abuse by other in-law relatives. When threatened that she would be beaten up if she revealed anything outside her in-law family, she warned that she would leave it all behind. Following her instinct, or as she recalls “I came in anger”, she jumped into the train without any money and belongings and arrived in Bhuj some seven years before the earthquake. We meet Kalila and her daughter Sofia for the first time when they were still living in one of the temporary shelters. By January 2021, the family had finally settled into their new permanent home, having fought for its construction and completion for years.

“I am ready to sit for my college exam and leave this village”

An account of Devi’s lived experiences in the context of recurrent droughts in Marathwada, reveals her daily negotiations and mutinies within the family and community, in the capacity of being an educated grassroots level worker. Devi is considered to be a female leader; someone the community turns to in times of crises. Whether it is to intervene when violence is meted out to fellow women in the community, or to enable a small loan for an impoverished family through the many Self-Help Groups (SHGs) she manages, Devi has become a force to reckon with for the people in her village. Although she is a member of the dominant and landed Maratha caste, her life has been one of strife and struggle. Devi’s relationship with her family, both natal and marital, are familiar stories of loss and grief. Although Devi grew up in a prosperous family, her alcoholic father, a Sub-Inspector at the local police station, made life difficult for the family, especially the mother. Thus, Devi was married to her maternal uncle back in the village at a young age to sustain social ties and garner support. After marriage, Devi referred to herself as an orphan, as untimely and unnatural death reduced her maternal family of seven to two. With no family to fall back on, Devi had to put up with experiences of severe abuse, including physical violence, for bearing daughters. As a mother, she knew that her daughters would be deserted and mistreated if not for her and committing suicide was not an option. Despite the many burdens, Devi

works for several development organizations, microfinance companies and local government task forces to earn a living in a resource-scarce rural context suffering from recurrent droughts. Devi straddles both the familial and social world with elan, interspersed with episodes of disillusionment.

“All the happiness is now crushed under this foot ... I feel now I have become a beggar ...”

As a survivor of the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai, Saina says people recall her by collective public memory only on anniversaries of the attack. She laments the attention she gets from the press, politicians, the public and others such as researchers because the attention amounts to nothing. Saina received 150,000 Indian rupees (approx. 2050 USD) from the government but ended up spending more than 150,000 Indian rupees just for her treatment. Despite her many attempts to secure fair compensation from the state, she states that she is yet to get what she deserves. Saina's is a story of upheaval, a transition from independence to dependence. Saina was one of the passengers in a taxi that was blasted; shrapnel lodged in her feet and she was shunted from hospital to hospital for days, went through surgery multiple times by a range of health care facilities and was not given the care and dignity she deserved. Saina talks about her “old life” with nostalgia, of those days when her uncle cared for the extra 11-member family orphaned by her father's death and resents having been moved away from her immediate and extended family following the event. She has been disillusioned by her multiple efforts to be heard, and the unmet expectations from the government bother her.

She can no longer walk and this transformation in ability has resulted in a stark change in the way she is treated by both her family and others. Saina is aware of the grave reluctance of her family members to provide any kind of care to her. She says no family is willing to give their daughter in marriage to her son, because of the perceived burden that she has become. This is a source of annoyance for Saina. In times such as these, she turns to religion. She thanks Allah for saving her life. She says, the person who saves lives is far superior to the person who kills. To her, recovery is possible only when she returns to a state of independence, autonomy and respect from her family.

3. Lived experiences of complex structural inequalities in the context of disaster recovery

Drawing from the theoretical framework of wounded attachments to recovery and intersectional experiences of inequality and vulnerability, the sections below elaborate the three life historical interviews from five analytical perspectives of gendered recovery experience: firstly, how the recovery beneficiary categories are experienced; secondly, how recovery reinforces gendered responsibilities as “building oneself back better”, a respectable mother and provider of care and livelihoods; thirdly, explain how recovery causes pain and suffering, and resentment towards the recovery initiatives; fourthly, how complex inequalities and social relations are lived through and negotiated in the aftermath of disasters; and finally, how these three women embody agency through mutual co-operation and networks of care and support, forming counter cultural expressions of every day to disaster recovery.

3.1. The neoliberal subject positions in disaster recovery: dissected bodies and identities

I had not seen my house for 14 months. I kept moving from one hospital to another. I have had six operations on my leg but even now, 80% of my leg is not working. Continuous intake of medicines has damaged my kidney and liver. I had no health problems but today I am totally dependent on medicines. I did not want my body to be operated on so many times, but it happened.

The experiences of Saina above demonstrate that it is just not

identities and the self that get dissected but even bodies that escape the terror of disasters are dissected and managed by experts in the same way. With each label, the focus and expectations change, and it is no different than the dissection process that ignores the whole being and her experiences across these multiple subject positions that go way beyond the politics of individualizing.

In fact, gendering the bodily experience has been a feminist preoccupation owing to the persistence of gender bias in health systems. The prevalence of andro-normativity within healthcare systems normalizes male bodily experience and disease values, while the differential female experience requires special recognition or it is subsumed under the garb of gender neutrality. Diagnostic processes and line of treatment that were researched on men and implemented were announced lines of treatment for all patients, including men and women. Further, culture-based gender norms and gender role expectations not only bring about inequities in healthcare access, but also a gender-bias in the treatment of pain. Attributes such as strength, stoicism, and ability to endure pain are associated with masculinity and accorded higher value than feminine attributes like sensitivity and to express discomfort [44].

Furthermore, the subject positions that the three women occupy range from that of different social identity, victim identity, to agentic women in the post disaster contexts. The three women thus occupy a range of identity positions, from generic welfare categories to access beneficiary emoluments, to that of community workers and leaders such as the COVID-19 task-force members or members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). They often fall into binary categories of “eligible” or “not eligible” households, or deserving and underserving beneficiaries, or victims or survivors. Even as survivors, they could be survivors of either disasters or gender-based violence or simply be members of a drought affected community. Apart from these neoliberal labels, they bear many social categories, such as daughter, mother, mother of daughters, daughter-in-law and many more.

The above mentioned multiple subject positions were not stable as constant changes in the schemes, programmes and their eligibility criteria required an ongoing effort to claim eligibility and sustain access to such services. For example, Devi got the land on her husband's name transferred to that of her children to fit into the landless labourer category and the services extended in the context of recurrent droughts. Devi is often disillusioned by the fact that she does not get paid for the work she does for the village and has to provide multiple documents to prove her eligibility for payment, which often never materializes. She expresses her disillusionment as follows:

... later he (Gram Sevak) asked me to submit an application on my official letter head and I did that ... still payment did not happen ... I asked him to pay me from the Gram panchayat funds, but he didn't ... during these COVID days even 100 Rs matter ... later when he asked me to join the survey for another project, I refused and scolded him saying ... you do not value the efforts of people ... now go and do the survey on your own ...

As Sania was falling short of money to support her surgical treatments, she kept applying for different schemes and services offered by the Government and Non-Governmental entities. She had to change hospitals for different types of surgery according to the eligibility criteria set by the various schemes and most often became ineligible for the scheme benefits despite her best efforts to fit in. She recounts her experiences of moving schools as per the criteria of funding organizations as follows:

... I went in for several meetings. Educational support and jobs were promised. The educational support came for only a few years, after which it was stopped. When the support started, I thought, I will enrol them in a good school, but the support stopped, then I enrolled them in a school where the fees were affordable to me ...

All the three women also bore the responsibility of proving

themselves eligible for services and benefits, along with continuously evolving and changing policy and programmes. Very often they couldn't handle the bureaucracy on their own and often relied on external support of informed community members/committee, contractors, middlemen, agents and even paid legal consultants, over and above the beneficiary contributions. This often only increased the likelihood of being exploited rather than reaping benefits. For example, having received the formal ownership of a temporary shelter in the temporary shelter neighbourhood with the initial contribution of 3000 Rs, Kalila became homeless once again when the temporary shelters in her row of shelters were demolished when the first more permanent houses were being constructed in 2004–5. Realizing her name was not on the list of beneficiaries she reflects on the moment:

At that time, I did not have any proof to tell them who I am. Then slowly, slowly I got a ration card and election card, receipt of children's school admission, and these all I gave to them. And then when the [new] list of houses was released, my name was also on it.

In fact, Kalila's and Sofia's lives, Sofia's since she was a young child, connect in several ways to recovery initiatives and beneficiary categories. Firstly, as collateral damage of the 2001 earthquake they had to vacate the house they had been renting for several years, and as a result, they ended up living in a tent for nearly two years, as the houseowner requested the house for their own use as theirs had collapsed in the earthquake. Finally, when she had managed to gather proof of her identity and gather enough money as a donation (55,000 Rs) to be eligible for an owner-driven urban housing unit as part of Rajiv Awas Yojna (see Ref. [42], the first contractor ran away with half of her investment, as was also the experience of 40 other families listed as beneficiaries for the project. The local charity organisation in charge of the building process, using its own internal credit system, has thereafter extended loans to all the house-owners the sum that was lost. Thus, instead of seeking justice collectively through the court, Kalila and her peers are paying more than double for the house that they were eligible for.

3.2. *The politics of responsibility, self-making and failure*

As already emerging from the previous sections, the narratives of the three mothers reveal life histories of struggle and hardship; their everyday world of constant change, uncertainty and violence, further disrupted by disasters. They keep the family afloat, educate their children, safeguard their daughters from abuse and any onslaught to the dignity of the family, rebuild homes, farm fields, lead and mentor other women, among many other responsibilities, almost single handedly with husbands either missing, distant or antagonistic to their efforts to succeed. They juggle multiple jobs, negotiate with multiple stakeholders, resort to multiple networks and strategies to ascertain their position of power and steer their families towards the so-called success in the neoliberal world. Often these travails are seen as part of life, that largely emanates from the responsibility of motherhood, but the ongoing and repeated nature of it shapes and structures the women's subjectivities differently depending on their past experiences, current circumstances, bodily abilities, resources, and networks, among others. The life histories capture the subjectivities of inequalities emerging from the ongoing and repeated travails of self-making captured through the narratives of the three women as follows:

My father died very early and my mother brought us all up, 11 brothers and sisters. We never felt that we did not have our father, our uncle took care of us. I was married in a good gharana [family]. I have enjoyed my life, with my children. I did many types of business, I stood for election in Zila parishad and won in UP. Then we moved to Maharashtra, then I was in the garments business, embroidery and then making umbrella frocks for the malls ... then I started in the dates business ... then eggs ... the tuitions ... I have worked a lot

now also I take tuitions with so much of pain ... recently I went to meet the manager of a bank to ask for a loan, for the garments business but he did not come. so, I planned to go some other day ...

Devi did not want to marry her uncle and move to the village from the city, but she agreed just for the sake of her parent's reputation. Though she was married into a wealthy family, recurrent droughts and other circumstances soon pushed them to live in unacceptable and unfamiliar circumstances. Being one of the few educated women, Devi farmed her land and took up all opportunities that came her way to work within the village. With three children and a family to run without much help from her husband, Devi would instrumentally use her position to get her personal interests fulfilled in a socially acceptable manner. She has been constructing her house and wants to build an outer gate to ensure the safety of her daughter. She also wants to make space for a new shop in front of the house to separate her businesses such as stitching, selling clothes, saree, sanitary pads, and xerox machines. Concerns have been raised about Devi taking advantage of SHG schemes to start multiple businesses and not extending the same to other women in the village.

The three women came from contexts in which, for a woman, success meant being a 'good mother' preferably of a son and the guardian of daughter's safety and morality. The three women worked relentlessly to live up to the expectations, despite their circumstances being at odds. They often had to manage circumstances that repeatedly threatened their image as a good mother/woman. Often in their attempts to optimize risk their actions could have been judged to be detrimental to the child's future. But rarely did they have an option to aspire for the so-called good future for the child, without accepting the label of being a bad mother/woman or through subversive practices, as is evident in the following excerpts:

Devi would instrumentally use her position to fulfil her daughter's desire to learn dance, go for a three-day school trip and have computer education within the village where it is still a taboo. She would go to any extent to cover up matters regarding her daughters, like attaining puberty or instances of sexual abuse, even from her husband and the community at large to protect the image of the good mother and safeguard her daughter's integrity, freedom, and safety. She had to get her daughter married at the age of 13 or 14 in one such balancing act. With a grown-up daughter at home a "good mother" is expected to be at home, thus restricting the mobility of both the mother and daughter. Though Devi receives several offers outside the village, she is keen on developing a stable source of income within the village for the reasons mentioned above.

Saina shares her worries about her daughter's marriage as follows:

... I tell my husband to look for a groom ... they go outside ... I am scared if she does anything wrong then what ... he says you look for the groom, but how do I do that, I can't go anywhere alone ... If any relative come to our house, I tell them to look for a groom, even if he is poor no problem ... just that he should be working. I am worried and tense, what will happen to my daughter, should I take care of myself or my daughter ... My husband is going to retire in three years, then how will I manage ... I still have the strength to move forward in life. I have the talent and strength, but I need someone's help, only then will I win ...

Furthermore, Kalila's and Sofia's experiences of the reconstruction and recovery period in Kachchh are stories of fighting for their right for motherhood and for having a mother - their response for having lost each other twice for "women's/girl children's empowerment". Firstly, when a foreign woman (an aid worker) arrived and offered her two children a place at their boarding school which was established as part of the earthquake recovery initiatives. Kalila was told not to visit the boarding school so as not to disturb the holistic education of her children until they turn 18. Being afraid she would lose her children; she demanded her children back. However, as recounted by her daughter,

the loss had already happened:

At the beginning I was so angry at her [mother] because I was not able to see her. I just saw her once a month. So, we were not able to recognize her anymore if a small child sees someone every day, and once in a month, the child cannot recognize/remember the person anymore.

Secondly, when Sofia was nearing adulthood, she eloped with her current husband, a neighbourhood Hindu boy she had a relationship with, as the families were refusing to accept their marriage. As a common response, her mother Kalila had filed a rape case against the husband, and thus, being a few months pregnant, and still few months below 18, Soniya was placed at a shelter for women, and the boy in detention for the court case. Soniya recalls: "When it was the court date that time the judge asked me "what do you want"? I said I want to stay with him, whether you say yes or no. My age was 18, then they cannot keep me." Sofia feels that this was already the second time she lost her mother, as the ashram did not allow her to meet her: "She was not speaking to me. Because of what I did. So of course, she was angry with me. I realised how it feels when I got a daughter. Like, if my daughter would do the same thing that I did with my mother, how would I feel then?"

3.3. Subjectivities of inequalities - pain, suffering, trauma, wounded attachments and resentment

The threat of imminent failure illustrated in the section above, which according to Ref. [45] is a state of being intimately connected with one's position within power relations – the wounded attachments, shape different subjectivities in the disaster recovery context depending on whether they internalize or externalize this failure. The externalization of failure in terms of pursuing a rights claim or finding a site of external blame, requires a closer identification with one's position within power relations and thus deepens wounded attachments and institutionally based resentment. The narratives that follow bring to light the subjectivities that emerge amidst the multiple attempts to thwart the imminent failure in the post disaster recovery context.

Saina narrates her frustration of not being heard in her multiple ongoing attempts to seek support and justice as follows:

... My children ... My Husband and I spoke to the Doctor and Chief Medical Officer that I need treatment and I cannot go home in this condition but no one listened to us and they discharged me ... I had written to the state collector for reimbursement of bills ... applied to Nager Sewak for Persons with Disability (PWD) livelihood support ... Many ministers promised so many things but they never did give anything three governments have changed since then ... I have written to all ... PM, health ministry ... I have approached everyone for support but no one helped me ...

Saina articulates her rights claims, the meaning that she internalizes and the resentment emerging from her experiences of seeking support and justice as follows:

... we give them a vote and I think we have full right to tell them our problem and they have the responsibility towards us ... I want to tell the PM of India that we too are the citizens of India, if the govt. supported us properly, I would have been standing today ... the doctor has suggested another operation ... I did not want my body to be operated on so many times but it happened, and I am not responsible for it ... whenever people came to my house and said that they will do something for us ... once again, I would have hopes ... but now my trust has been fully broken ... I can't trust anyone now ... I see it in the media showing my story ... people watch it also but then what's the result ... it's just another story ... Allah is very powerful, "marne wale se bachane wala bada hai" (The person who saves lives is far superior to the person who kills). I cry before Allah,

what's the need to cry before his creation. I have written several letters to officers in charge, but I feel now I have become a beggar ... Firstly the 26/11 terrorist wounded me and secondly the government has given me more painful wounds ...

All the happiness is now crushed under this foot, I am not able to go to weddings, functions and programmes. I feel ashamed of my leg, the situation in which, I am right now. I don't like walking with support, I feel people look at me as needy ... I don't like to go anywhere now.

Devi was very tense and confused with the allegation against her of misappropriating SHG money for personal interest and not doing enough. Contemplating a way out she says:

If situation comes, I am ready to sit for my college exam and I am ready to leave this village ... I worked for them, but they misunderstood my work. Now I am tired of these people ... Even if it is 10 Rs it is very important for me ... I am confused now on what will happen? There is no work in rural areas and if I wish to work in the village, people have a problem and don't let me work. I don't want to work with private micro-finance, but they will not let me resign because of my good work. Though there are many good opportunities to work outside the village that offer good money, I don't want to leave the village. Even if the income is less, I can manage all my work within the village, cultivate the farm. Above all, I don't want to work outside considering my daughter's safety. In this village people fight with me and often use abusive words while talking to me.

Though Devi attributes her problems to local politics coloured by personal interests, she occasionally gets into self-doubt and says:

... these people in the village are causing so much trouble, which sometimes make me feel that I am unable to continue contributing to my village

Even when the subjects externalize the pain and suffering, it is often directed back on themselves as self-doubt, shame, and guilt over and above the emotions of worry, tension, anger and confusion that they embody during the process of externalization. The interviews with Sofia and Kalila both included repeated reflection upon their anger – towards people and processes of recovery in which they feel they were mistreated, ignored, or used. Kalila explains: "maybe I ate the meat of lion and because of which I became so angry". In expressing their anger, both women simultaneously express their attempts to solve the situation; reject the mistreatment and oppose the wrongdoings:

He [the contractor] came to the bank and again insulted me. I said, don't use bad words about me, otherwise I will break your head with a stone, then I will go to the police and the organisations that gave the money and tell them that this happened to me. He stopped asking for that money after that.

3.4. The embodied emotional and physical experiences of complex inequalities

The different emotions manifesting the subjectivities of inequalities extends itself in shaping the physical experiences of complex power relations. The emotions that the women experience and elicit from others is the manifestation of power relations that constructs each of the subject as an object of hate, neglect, anger, disgust, fear and more [29, 31,46]. As discussed by Emily Grabham, the physicality of power relations is structured by emotions that are socially and historically mediated and reside outside the individual subject: "physical encounters, movements towards and away from other people in acts of affection, violence or aversion are determined by, and determine, one's position in relation to power relations" [29]; 199). Physical encounters become based on injury - the experience of discrimination and marginalization - and create wounded attachments to structures that

regulate the lives of these identities, as argued by Wendy [24]. For Saina, her initial days of neglect in the hospital is an experience of injury. She states:

For 22 days, I was on saline. For two weeks, there was no dressing of my wounds. For 22 days no operation was performed on me.

Saina, being conscious of her rights and the violation of the same, was very angry and vocal right from her initial days of hospitalization. She would push authorities to listen to her by resorting to media and voicing her concerns in public, yet these fell on deaf ears. She attributes her incomplete treatment and early discharge to this very attribute of demanding justice. She recollects one of her experiences of being silenced at the hospital:

The day of Prathibha Patil's [President of India] visit, the hospital tried to show a clean picture of the injured they shifted the injured to a clean room with new bedsheets and pillowsthey moved me to another room fearing that I would speak up to the President the President finally saw only the men who were injured

With time, Saina feels neglected, dejected and unheard even within her family circles and she expressed it as follows:

Sons have married and moved out with their wife. Now my daughter is 26 years old and we are unable to get a groom for her. We are seven sisters and four brothers still no one is ready to take my daughter in marriage into their family. Not just that I am not well but also that we have no money and no house of our own. My husband is also getting irritated of my health problems. Being my husband, sometimes he is so rude with me that I don't feel like living anymore.

Feminist scholarship has often identified the family as a site of oppression. Like Saina, Devi too painfully remembers her difficult days of neglect and physical violence. She had faced abuse inside the home while she was pregnant with her third child, after two daughters. Fearing the birth of a third girl child she was forced to go for an abortion by her husband and his parents, and when she refused, they directed aversion and torture towards her pregnant body:

When I went into labour no one was around to help me out as my husband was drunk and sleeping at home. Even after a son was born, I was not given the kind of rest and nutrition a woman needs at that time. That is the reason for my poor health, frequent body ache and stomach aches. I was very beautiful with long hair, fair skin and most appropriate facial features, but neglect, abuse and hardship has turned me into this ...

Not conforming to patriarchal impositions of expected feminine behaviour comes with its share of repercussions. For Kalila and Sofia, their intergenerational experience of breaking the gendered norms of their family/community, has had its toll in their neighbourhood relationships: when the neighbour's girl eloped with a boy, Sofia and Kalila helped her by giving her a mobile phone sim card and providing her with some cash for the journey "when you come here, come here happily" they said to her, and later attempted to smooth her father's reactions. Instead, the family saw them as being responsible for the daughter's decision: "this all is the matter, your daughter made my daughter run away", the father accused Kalila. Although Kalila stood up for her daughter suggesting to the father "your daughter is not that simple as you think" which only resulted in a violent revenge by the women of the family: the girl's mother and two sisters came to beat Sofia up: "They also slapped her maybe twice and I thought that it was also her fault that she had delivered the sim card. And I decided to forget everything. The [actual] matter is of the land, my residency, which makes this all so big (talk of the town, gossip)."

The three women's experience of violence, abuse, and neglect are rooted in the impressions that others make of their bodies. These

impressions are an intensely embodied phenomenon that draw from historical and cultural memories that are difficult to reframe in any one instance [29]. The lives of these women also demonstrate negation and subversion of these impressions as they negotiate complex relations. As an example, nearing its completion, Kalila's family was yet to move in as the new house, the "empty box" as Sofia calls it, entails potential new neighbourhood dynamics: closeness to neighbours may cause conflicts. The extended wait for the new home was now overshadowed by fear and worry of communalism expressed as impressions of impending doom, Kalila narrates:

Everyone is having Mahabharata [used as a metaphor for war; based on the Indian epic about warring dynasties] in their house. Some people are suffering from debt, some are having family problems. There is one old lady living in a new house. She lost her two young sons within two months. One suffered from heart attack, one got a dangerous disease from which he did not survive ... Some people are facing the problem of snakes at midnight that disappear. Other see horror things, some people saw that Gods started to dance. Television turns on and off even if it is switched off. Someone left for the market and locked the house, when she came back the house was locked from inside. People say that there was an old temple that was demolished. The Temple of Shiv Shankar (small, old one). One of the boys who died was a priest of that temple. It was such a beautiful temple; people were not wanting to demolish that.

Saina negates her cultural identity of being a Muslim woman and its association with the Islamic terrorist and related questions of her undeserving status, in very subtle ways as follows:

this terrorist attack was done with planning and with a purpose. this is done with a thought, there is no place for religion in this no Hindu or Muslim, the basic aim was to kill as many as possible ... and this is not a good thing. If God doesn't want it, it won't happen, every religion is the same for me. the people from all the religions came forward to help me. When I went to the hospital, I did not see my community, but the Hindu community stood in front of me to help me. This is the truth. I was not helped with money much, but the people of Mumbai had prayed for me. When I came from Sion hospital, like an angel a Hindu brother was standing before me. I felt my wounds and worries didn't matter any more with his support for me.

Devi is a member of the village committee to bridge the gap between instances of violence against women and the filing of complaints with the police. Her subversive practices of resolving such gendered issues are guided by her socio-cultural conditioning and community norms that she has internalised. Hence, she often intervenes and resolves the matter within the household or neighbourhood. Though the act of violence and abuse is very much in the public sphere in the form of gossips and rumours, most instances of violence, especially sexual abuse, are relegated to the private sphere and prevented from appearing in the formal public sphere. Devi finds it to be the most rational decision considering the context that she operates in especially the delay in justice and the heightened threat that whistle blowers encounter. In the case of her daughter, considering her daughter's future she filed a case against the perpetrators with herself as the victim and got her daughter married at the early age of 13 or 14 years.

3.5. Agency, reaching out, coalitions, care and support

The three women had to transgress the gendered norm of "good womanhood" on an everyday basis to negotiate their social positions of complex inequalities in some of the most difficult circumstances. With time, it has hardened them, and their assertions have become a routine. However, Kalila remembers her first step towards such a transgression as one of the more difficult experiences in her life as follows: "When I think of those days, I feel like this earth will be torn apart and I will jump into

it". Being shattered at first has changed into a pattern that even outsiders recognise as their "family trait":

Kalila: What to do? Even a fool will learn to behave after experiences in this world.

Sofia: She is saying that if that girl will learn how to face difficulties since childhood, then there would not be any problems in the future ... Our row of shelters was so famous [for fighting]. No other lane was like ours.

Assertion and sustaining self-respect have their economic consequences, though: Having worked as a cleaner at a hospital for nearly 14 years, she quit to protect her self-respect and honour from assaults by a male doctor. Although the income was essential for the economic wellbeing of her family, she quit and started folding cellophane candy for a neighbour: "If I tie 100 I will get 7 R s." (For a more detailed analysis of working conditions of women in the slums of Bhuj, see De et al., 2019).

Devi's monopoly and dominance over the micro-finance networks and SHG programmes was well known to the villagers, but they dismissed it of being of any significance until she started asserting her position. Though her decision of not extending a loan to one of the influential members of the community was challenged, she managed to assert herself using the networks that she had within the functionaries of the schemes. As finding a women representative was difficult in the village, Devi would often get away with such challenges. However, after receiving an apology from the concerned individual for challenging her decision, she sanctioned the loan and takes pride in narrating the incident to many women in the village. Asserting oneself and transgressing gender norms has become part of her everyday as she encounters challenges in collecting micro-finance instalments on a regular basis. Over the years, she has moved from having an accommodative approach of paying on behalf of the beneficiary to that of forcefully extracting dues by lifting valuables such as livestock in lieu of the instalment amount.

Resolving unmet needs during recovery has required the three women recovering from relationships, to build strengths and reaching out to strangers – with a leap of trust. In the case of Kalila, starting life anew in Kachchh, despite the complex experiences with the recovery efforts aimed at empowering and improving their lives, has literally meant constructing a new family and support network relations with trustworthy people. In fact, to emphasise these relations, Kalila would either use "hum" or "we", or "mai" or "I" when describing events and emotions in interview situations. We suggest that it is a narrative strategy of weaving her experiences through relationships in UP and later in Kachchh. Using "we", Kalila forms her social networks and resistance to patriarchal values that are simultaneously gendered and reiterate religious and classed discrimination – constantly questioning her reputation and honour, and the qualities of her motherhood.

Similarly, drawing from her experience of injury and pain during pregnancy, Devi supports village women for health-related issues even though she is not a village Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA). She said that village ASHA do not work properly and rarely visit the ill people and accompany them to hospital whenever it is necessary. Devi goes every time when village women ask her to come with them to visit a doctor, consult an expert or to do an operation. Devi is also connected to most of the maternal relatives of the women in the village. When their daughters are in trouble, she would inform the maternal family immediately and get them to pitch in with their support.

4. Discussion: wounded attachments reconfiguring disaster recovery

As the three life histories above illustrate, the complex process of disaster recovery is one that is non-linear and involves negotiating with a range of structures and social norms. Women's lives are influenced by the aid machinery, state, family and the community even as they carry

out their daily roles as mothers and caregivers in a given disaster recovery context. In this article, we have proposed a theoretical frame of wounded attachments to disaster recovery to capture the complexity of gendered structural violence that play out in the everyday context of social relations and processes. We have extended Wendy Brown's [24] and Emily Grabham's [29] theorising on wounded attachments into disaster recovery as registers of pain and injury that result from both identity and legal rights claims. Such pain, as suggested, emerges as a result of power and hierarchies and is intimately connected to the recovery processes of "building back better", and gets manifested in everyday lives. Drawing from our analysis, such complexity challenges the binary of disaster exceptionality and everyday life after the disaster.

This article has demonstrated the interface between wounded attachments to gendered social positions and everyday pain and suffering, as manifested in the disaster recovery process. The neoliberal subject positions ascribed by the state or recovery aid machinery, along with the everyday gendered social relations and processes, bring about impressions and identities that structure subjectivities of both victimhood and agency. These very everyday lived experiences and processes are reinforced and exacerbated in the process of disaster recovery, challenging the binary of disaster exceptionality and "un-ness" [47] [1983]), by capturing the disaster event as part of the continuum of precariousness of everyday life. In doing so, the structures of power that operate and replicate the environments of oppression that create gendered inequities become evident.

From our analysis, wounded attachments in disaster recovery consist, at least, of the following five registers: Firstly, women's everyday lives become enmeshed with the ideals of neoliberal subjects of the recovery efforts. To the state and disaster aid industry, these women are primarily potential beneficiaries of post-disaster welfare schemes. As seekers of aid, compensation, healthcare services, reimbursements, and welfare emoluments, women embody desires of neoliberal subject who actively negotiate with state and aid delivery bodies for their rights. Saina privately funding her own healthcare and hospitalization is a prime example of 'everyday neoliberalism' [48]. This emphasis on 'individualized responsibility' for one's own recovery, with simultaneous retreat of the welfare state, are features of the wider neo-liberal agenda [49]: politico-economic practices that pushes individuals to the market even for basic needs and the widening economic disparities and debt-fuelled consumption [50].

These women - in all the three disaster recovery contexts discussed above – participate in the recovery landscape as neoliberal political actors who interact with a range of other actors, their families, the state, aid organizations and other members of society who are inextricably linked to their lives, sometimes aiding, sometimes hampering their recovery process. For example, even as members of her family distance themselves from her, Saina speaks of the Hindu man who helped her when she was injured. Saina is unable to forget the incident that changed her life but remembers, despite the trauma, the assistance she received in her lowest moments.

Secondly, recovery efforts reinforce and depend on gendered responsibilities within the family sphere. Previous feminist scholarship had long identified the family as a site of oppression. In the Indian context, the socialization process is one rife with reminders that a young girl's membership to her natal family is in fact temporary. The patrilineal and patri virilocal nature of society alienates and disconnects women from their birth families [51]. The lives of the women discussed herewith reflect that a woman is never absolved of familial responsibility. Even as their daily lives as disaster survivors is filled with want, sometimes despair, they continue to carry out their daily familial obligations. When it comes to the parenting philosophies of Kalila, Saina and Devi, control over their daughters' mobility and autonomy through a maternal instinct for regulation is evident. Within the familial space, women's everyday negotiations with patriarchy, patrilineal and patri virilocal processes that perpetuate leave them challenged. Thus, in disaster recovery contexts, it becomes important to view their life worlds

as a microcosm of such wider social ethos.

Further, the social construction of a “good woman” and a “good mother” reinforces gender roles and responsibilities within the familial environment. Care giving and keeping one’s reputation intact for single mothers as well as daughters have been important considerations for women like Devi and Kalila. Patriarchal impositions of modesty and expectations of upholding feminine honour, and by extension, family honour become increasingly non-negotiable in these conservative contexts of disaster recovery.

Thirdly, recovery efforts cause pain and suffering, and resentment. As minority identities located on the intersections of religion, gender and class, Saina’s, Sofia’s & Kalila’s narratives are ones that have enough socio-cultural burden as it is. Saina’s memory of the trauma suffered poses a threat to the idea of emotional recovery. Social memory of traumatic events or “disaster memory” explores how individual and collective memory of past events influences present events [52]. Saina’s case raises the question of the intricate and complicated linkages between memories of trauma and holistic recovery. In times of distress, she turns to religion. Human societies interpret disasters in different ways and religious beliefs and value frameworks drawn from religion become sources of hope and help mediate relationships between humans and their environment [53].

With the added weight of disability and dependence, discrimination is amplified in the case of Saina. Disabled women occupy a “multifarious” position and with plural axes of oppression; their everyday life can be perplexing and difficult [54]. Deep religious and cultural beliefs link any form of disability to karma or the belief that one is suffering because of “past sins.” These lines of bias manifest as discrimination faced by persons with disability. Both diseased bodies and disabled bodies are subjected to gaze that is a combination of curiosity, sympathy and repulsion. The gaze directed towards a person with disability is a gaze of violence (Jain [55]). For Devi, the cause of pain and suffering in the familial environment has been immediately post her marriage. In her marital home she was abused for not giving birth to sons. Son preference is a recurring theme in the Indian context. For both religious and economic reasons, the preference for a son has shaped societal attitudes for centuries. This proclivity for sons results in the neglect, abandonment as well as infanticide of girl children.¹ The terminology ‘missing girls’ was coined by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen to denote not only sex selective abortions but also infanticide and abandonment leading to infanticide at birth as well as malnutrition leading to death of the girl child [56].

Fourthly, everyday life in recovery pushes the women to negotiate with structures of power. The women in question inhabit a complex social world that require daily negotiations with various structures of power and the community at large. Through both formal and informal social groupings and networks, the women interact with a range of social actors such as members from other caste groups, members of community-based organizations, women from the Self-Help Groups, officials from local self-governing bodies, amongst others. For example, Devi is often at the helm of issues pertaining to community justice such as gender-based violence, domestic abuse or decisions pertaining to the worthiness of a borrower.

The grapevine often scrutinizes and passes judgement on these women’s decisions in general, leading to gossip and rumours. The interpersonal relationships amongst and within these collective social groups may transform into social capital by providing a sense of community, safety and an access to community resources; such arrangements may serve as an enabler to recovery. On the contrary, community conflicts and public mistrust may adversely affect recovery. Studies have revealed

that social capital has played an instrumental role in household and community recovery processes in the wake of disasters [57]. For the women in question, who are part of a larger public world, the politics of those around them influences their daily lives. Over the years, gender scholarship has drawn attention to ongoing paradigm shifts that have occurred in social relationships, especially the increased engagement of women in public spaces so as to enact democratic politics [58].

Finally, we also suggest, that the pain and suffering, and negotiation, is also enmeshed with the embodying of agency in recovery. Elizabeth Schneider [59] in her essay titled *Feminism and the False Dichotomy of Victimization and Agency* argues that it is a static view to look at women as either victims or agents; this is a false dichotomy and a unidimensional and linear way of locating the experiences of survivors. Therefore, one must not locate the women in question in either of the binary positions of victim or agent, but treat these two positions as opposite ends of a spectrum. It is necessary to acknowledge that these women have made agentic choices at various points of time in their lives even as they experienced isolation and discrimination at other points [59]. Accordingly, the complexity and irreducible nature of experiences of Kalila, Sofia, Devi and Saina cannot be placed within narrow and unidimensional frames of victimhood and state apathy. A nuanced and layered analysis of their lives mediated through their various intersecting identities is necessary. The vignettes above reveal subjectivities often seeped in ambivalence, stories of poverty, narratives of agency, accounts of courage, laments of vulnerability, the resolve of the everyday, persistent memories of the past, uncertainty about the future and the lingering question of recovery. The three women maybe discursively situated in several identity paradigms; these identities interact with various social institutions – the family, the state, religion and so on. Each of these institutions enable (or prevent, as the case maybe) wholistic recovery that considers individual articulations on what recovery means to them.

To conclude, we argue that adopting life historical perspective to recovery and vulnerabilities, allows deeper understanding of intersectional power relations (or interlocking systems of power) that are embodied on an individual level as emotions, physical encounters and intensifications of feelings [29]; 196, 198). By studying specific historical, contextualised lived experience [32,60] in contexts of devastation, an in-depth understanding on what social, economic, and political dynamics are at play emerges [60]. By using the subjective lived experience of pain and suffering, firstly, it challenges, de-stabilises and goes beyond the governmentally produced disaster victim categories/social welfare categories as articulated above, drawing from the work of Grabham [29]; secondly, it draws attention to the complexity of inequalities (going beyond the recognition of complex categories/identity) in the disaster recovery context, of those who fit and do not fit into governmentally produced categories of deserving and undeserving disaster victims [25]; and finally, it allows reconsidering the ontology and epistemology of understanding and addressing injury/trauma within the context of disaster recovery.

Lastly, we briefly return to the difficulty of transferring theoretical and analytical concepts into policy frameworks and praxis we queried in the introduction. Although disaster scholars have identified institutions and the structural violence embedded in them to be one of the key factors contributing to the persistence of structural inequalities and injustice [11,12,25], this has not been the priority of research especially in the context of disasters.

Though institutions are seen to be relatively persistent, practice of disaster recovery is guided by the assumption that in addressing complex intersectional inequalities and interlocking “major systems of oppressions” institutions are more malleable than other determinants of human social relations [61]. Thus, institutions and institutional change have been at the centre of global action in addressing issues of social inequality and injustices (UN [22,62]). The crafting of ideal institutions or contextualizing institutions has been the mainstream intervention for bringing about institutional change in addressing issue of social

¹ As per the 2011 census in India the sex ratio in the age group of 0–6 years stood at 914 females per 1000 males; this was a drop from 927 females per 1000 males as per the 2001 census which in itself was a drop from 945 in 1991. It is estimated that the number of ‘missing girls’ worldwide is around 200 million.

inequalities and justice ([22]).

However, amongst other researchers [63,64] we find these efforts to be tokenistic with no transformative change in the everyday lives of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. The critical institutionalist comprising scholars questioning the very foundations of institutions and its potential to address issues of exclusion, advocate for a process of institutional change that embrace complexity and pluralism of institutions by focusing on its historical foundations, embeddedness in everyday social life, and the interactions among formal, informal, traditional and modern arrangements [65–68].

While the work of these scholars is less visible and their operational impact not immediately felt, they should be of interest as they allow the mainstream approach to be put into perspective. Thus, they push for institutional change that is radical or transformative such as the proposition to use the feminist framework as the starting point for re-thinking institutional framework for addressing disasters [19,20,69]. This article also makes a humble contribution in this regard with regard to putting the mainstream disaster recovery approaches into perspective from the lens of social inequality and injustice of the everyday.

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